

Sportscar on the Road to Middle Age...

By Rick Chatenever

SPORTSCAR MENOPAUSE by Page Stegner, Atlantic-Little, Brown and Company. 243 pp. \$8.95.

Poor Eliot Warren. Here he is almost 40 years old, stuck with the mentality of a post-adolescent. To look at him he seems fairly normal, a typical professor at a progressive, redwood covered California university campus. He has been married for 15 years. He has a 4-year-old son.

Just an ordinary man. Of course most ordinary men somehow manage to accept the responsibilities that come with middle-aged manhood. The body is aging—there's nothing that can be done about it. Ambitious dreams of the future have become little more than dim, fleeting memories. Excitement is provided in weekly doses, by football on television. Security is suddenly very important—for the first time it begins to make sense to want to own a piece of the rock.

While the arrival of middle age is not necessarily a cause for celebration, most men realize there is little they can do to avoid, or even to forestall it. Such realizations are the mark of maturity. But, as mentioned earlier, maturity is not one of Eliot Warren's strong suits.

Eliot Warren is not a real person. He is instead the fictional creation of Santa Cruz writer Page Stegner—the protagonist of Stegner's new novel, **SPORTSCAR MENOPAUSE**.

Like his protagonist, Stegner is also approaching

that time in his life (he is 40)...is also a professor of American Literature at a "free" California university (our very own UCSC)...and is also, obviously, a writer of fiction.

Despite these similarities, however, Stegner denies that he and his protagonist are the same person. As he puts it, he wrote the book as a challenge for himself, to take an everyday situation, a cast of everyday characters, and "see if I could breathe life into them."

At this Stegner may have been more successful than he intended. Those familiar with UCSC (or for that matter, with most other modern university campuses), will find the book's premise and characters a very accurate mirror of their own academic experiences of the late 60s and 70s. To wit, Warren the professor chooses to forsake wife, child, and responsibility for a coed half his age, who is not only beautiful, but also embodies all of the unfettered attitudes (among other things, she organizes nude-ins) that Warren's own upbringing lacked.

Don't we all know the story? Haven't we all seen it acted out by a whole procession of over-age Romeo's, each proclaiming that he has not yet lost his youth by dressing in puka shells and levis (tastefully let out at the waist)...?

For as standard as the situation is though, Stegner manages to keep it interesting, mostly through the tone he uses to tell Warren's story. Lacing his first per-

son account with irony and gentle self-mockery, he infuses the tale with wit and irony. The tone is captivating—we wind up drawn into Warren's situation, identifying with his perspective, even at the same time that we are realizing what a jerk he is.

The book's success then, stems from Stegner's prowess as a writer. It is tight and well crafted, engrossing not only to those local

readers who will recognize all sorts of Santa Cruz landmarks in its pages, but also to a larger readership interested in a candid account of a man trying to come of age, 20 years after the fact.

The ironic tone of Stegner's writing carries over into his speaking. In the Sentinel office recently, he freely discussed his new novel, his background, and his plans for the future.

Coming as he does from

an illustrious literary family, (his father is Pulitzer Prize winning author Wallace Stegner) Page is both product and proponent of the "California school" of American writing. With a Ph.D. from Stanford, he has been a member of the UCSC faculty since 1968, dividing his academic chores between literary scholarship and fiction writing. He has written critical texts, "Escape Into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov", as well as previous novels, **THE EDGE** in 1968, and **HAWKS AND HARRIERS** in 1970. Additionally Stegner served as a high level Peace Corps administrator between 1970 and '73, first in Venezuela and later in Ecuador.

Returning from that tour of duty, he started writing **SPORTSCAR...** upon returning to Santa Cruz in 1974.

In a funny way he suggests that the book was suggested by Watergate, and by the realization that no matter how imaginative a modern novelist might be, he will be hard pressed to compete with the drama of everyday realities.

He characterizes this and other of his writings as "attempts to deal with this whole fiction that we live every day."

Book On Male Endocrinology

THE VIRILITY FACTOR, a new book for the layman about the male hormone, testosterone, has been written by Robert Bahr. It contains an introduction by Herbert Kupperman, M.D., Ph.D., and

While downplaying regional differences between modern American writers, he acknowledges that California novelists are confronted with a unique world to try to describe. It is a mobile, rootless society, with an ever-increasing rate of change that seems to transform the natural landscape into an artificial one, almost as you watch.

"You can go away from your home town for a year," he says, "and when you get back, you need a roadmap." Nonetheless Stegner is happy to be located in Santa Cruz, characterizing it as "an ideal place to live and work."

On that subject, work, Stegner has a number of projects underway that promise to keep him busy for some time. In the process of wrapping up a collection of humorous essays ("somewhere between fiction and non-fiction"), some of which first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the last step is to select a title.

"It will be called 'Men to Match My Mountains: A Parable of Abundance and Fulfillment in the Far West' " he says. "Either that, or 'Road Apple Rodeo'."

Additionally he is collaborating with his father on two texts, the first to be an entire issue of *The Atlantic* on the subject of the Rocky

Mountain states, which will be out in the spring. The second is a 100,000 word text, which will be accompanied by the photography of Eliot Porter. Working title for this project is "North America".

Luckily for their readers, two generations of Stegners have found the American West to be a rich vein, not of gold but of inspiration and understanding of its society. Their method of mining these riches is not with pick and shovel, but with the probing written word.

For Page Stegner it is a process bound up with personal, as well as larger values.

"Writing a book is an attempt to articulate," he says, "to figure out what it

is that I think I think." There will be a chance to find out more of what Page Stegner thinks a week from this Saturday, October 8, from 2-5 p.m. when Stegner will be at the Bookshop Santa Cruz to sign copies of his new novel **SPORTSCAR MENOPAUSE**.

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